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Address to:

Box Patent Application                      Attorney's Docket No. NSC1-H1200  
Assistant Commissioner for Patents                      [P04776]  
Washington, D.C. 20231                      First Named Inventor VLADISLAV VASHCHENKO

**UTILITY PATENT APPLICATION TRANSMITTAL**  
( under 37 CFR 1.53(b) )

SIR:

Transmitted herewith for filing is the patent application entitled:  
DIAC ESD PROTECTION STRUCTURE FOR CMOS TECHNOLOGY

**CERTIFICATION UNDER 37 CFR § 1.10**

I hereby certify that this New Application and the documents referred to as enclosed herein are being deposited with the United States Postal Service on this date September 11, 2000, in an envelope bearing "Express Mail Post Office To Addressee" Mailing Label Number EL387336848US addressed to: Box Patent Application, Assistant Commissioner for Patents, Washington, D.C. 20231.

**SUSAN OZANNE**

*Susan Ozanne*

(Name of person mailing paper)

(Signature)

Enclosed are:

- I. ☒ Transmittal Form (two copies required)
- II. The papers required for filing date under CFR § 1.53(b):
  - i. 12 Pages of specification (including claims and abstract);
  - ii. 1 Sheets of drawings.  
      ☐ formal                      ☒ informal
- III. Declaration or oath
  - a. ☒ Newly executed (original or copy)
- IV. ☐ Microfiche Computer Program (Appendix, see 37 CFR 1.96)
- V. ☐ Nucleotide and/or Amino Acid Sequence Submission (if applicable, all necessary)
  - i. ☐ Computer Readable Copy
  - ii. ☐ Paper Copy (identical to computer copy)
  - iii. ☐ Statement verifying identity of above copies

**ACCOMPANYING APPLICATION PARTS**

- VI. ☒ An assignment of the invention to National Semiconductor Corporation is attached (including Form PTO-1595).
  - i. ☐ 37 CFR 3.73(b) Statement (when there is an assignee)
- VII. ☐ Power of Attorney
- VIII. ☐ An Information Disclosure Statement (IDS) is enclosed, including a PTO-1449 and copies of ☐ references.

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XVII. All correspondence regarding this application should be forwarded to the undersigned attorney:

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XVIII. Authorization to Charge Additional Fees

X The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any additional fees (or credit any overpayment) associated with this communication and which may be required under 37 CFR § 1.16 or § 1.17 to Account No. 12-1420. A duplicate of this transmittal is attached.

LIMBACH & LIMBACH L.L.P.

September 11, 2000  
(Date)

Attorney Docket No. NSC1-H1200  
[P04776]

By: 

Mayumi Maeda  
Registration No. 40,075  
Attorney(s) or Agent(s) of Record

002160" 38E09260

PATENT**ELECTROSTATIC DISCHARGE (ESD)  
PROTECTION STRUCTURE**

INVENTORS: Vladislav Vashchenko, Peter J. Hopper and Manuel Carneiro

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**BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**1. Field of the Invention

10 The present invention relates to semiconductor device structures and, in particular, to electrostatic discharge protection structures for use with integrated circuits.

2. Description of the Related Art

15 Electrostatic discharge (ESD) protection devices are commonly employed in an integrated circuit (IC) to protect electronic devices in the IC from spurious pulses of excessive voltage (e.g., an ESD event, Human Body Model [HBM] event, or Electrical Overstress [EOS] event). See, for example, S.M. Sze, *Electrostatic Discharge Damage*, in VLSI Technology, Second Edition, 648-650 (McGraw Hill, 1988). A variety of conventional ESD  
20 protection devices that make extensive use of diodes, metal-oxide-semiconductor field effect transistors (MOSFETs), and bipolar transistors are known in the field. For example, conventional ESD protection devices for use with CMOS integrated circuits include Grounded Gate MOS (GGMOS) ESD protection structures and Low Voltage Silicon Controlled Rectifier (LVSCR)  
25 ESD protection structures. Descriptions of these and other conventional ESD protection structures are available in Haigang, et al., *A Comparison Study of ESD Protection for RFICs: Performance vs. Parasitics*, 2000 IEEE Radio Frequency Integrated Circuits Symposium, 235-237 (2000); U.S. patent application for "MOSFET Structure For Use in ESD Protection Devices" (filed  
30 July 17, 2000; application number not yet assigned) and U.S. Patent Application No. 09/205,110 (filed December 3, 1998), each of which is hereby fully incorporated by reference.

Conventional MOSFET structures are designed to exhibit breakdown characteristics only at voltages well above their standard operating supply voltage. However, during an ESD event, GGMOS ESD structures exhibit current conduction via a parasitic lateral bipolar mechanism. For a further description of current conduction in GGMOS ESD structures via a parasitic lateral bipolar mechanism, see E. A. Amerasekera et al., *ESD in Silicon Integrated Circuits*, sections 3.5.2 and 3.6 (John Wiley & Sons, 1995), which are hereby fully incorporated by reference.

ESD events can be of either a negative polarity or a positive polarity. Conventional GGMOS or LVSCR ESD protection structures can only protect electronic devices in an IC from a single polarity ESD event. Thus, two such structures are required to protect electronic devices in an IC from ESD events of both polarities.

The ESD protection capability of ESD protection devices is characterized by their snapback holding voltage and their maximum snapback current. ESD protection capability is improved at lower snapback holding voltages and higher maximum snapback current. Conventional GGMOS and LVSCR ESD protection structures operate via an avalanche-injection conductivity modulation mechanism. This mechanism, however, provides a relatively high snapback holding voltage and a relatively low snapback current.

Still needed in the field, therefore, is an ESD protection structure that can protect electronic devices in an IC from ESD events of both positive and negative polarities, has a low snapback holding voltage and a high maximum snapback current.

## **SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION**

The present invention provides an ESD protection structure for use with ICs that can protect electronic devices in an IC from ESD events of both positive and negative polarities, has a low snapback holding voltage and a high maximum snapback current.

ESD protection structures for use with ICs according to the present invention include a semiconductor substrate (e.g., a silicon substrate) of a first conductivity type (typically P-type), a first well region of a second conductivity type (typically N-type) disposed in the semiconductor substrate, and a second well region, also of the second conductivity type, disposed in the semiconductor substrate. The first and second well regions are separated by a gap region of the first conductivity type that is disposed in the semiconductor substrate.

Also included in ESD structures according to the present invention are a first floating region and a second floating region, each of the second conductivity type, disposed in the first well region and second well region respectively. The first and second floating regions are adjacent to the gap region. The ESD structures further include first and second contact regions of the first conductivity type disposed on the first and second well regions, respectively, and spaced apart from the first and second floating regions, respectively. In addition, the ESD structures include first and second contact regions of the second conductivity type that are also disposed on the first and second well regions, respectively, and also spaced apart from the first and second floating regions, respectively.

ESD protection structures according to the present invention can be thought of as a variant of a DIAC structure that provides ESD protection capability by the distinctive addition of first and second floating regions, and a P-type contact region and an N-type contact region in each of the first and second well regions.

During operation, ESD protection structures according to the present invention undergo primary breakdown via a low current avalanche breakdown mechanism in the gap region between the first and second floating regions. Following this low current avalanche breakdown, and when the current has exceeded a critical switching value, the ESD protection structures exhibit "double injection" of holes and electrons from an N-type and a P-type contact region, one in each of the first and second well regions, to attain a high maximum snapback current. This high maximum snapback current is attributed

to mutual space charge neutralization and conductivity modulation in the gap region (and an associated reduction in the electric field).

5 An advantage of ESD protection structures according to the present invention is that they are symmetrical (i.e., each of the first and second well regions has both an N-type contact region and a P-type contact region disposed therein). The ESD protection structures can, therefore, protect electronic devices in an IC from ESD events of both a negative and a positive polarity. ESD protection structures according to the present invention can be manufactured using conventional semiconductor manufacturing process  
10 techniques (e.g., 0.18 micron CMOS process technologies) and are, therefore, compatible for use with CMOS integrated circuits.

#### **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

15 A better understanding of the features and advantages of the present invention will be obtained by reference to the following detailed description that sets forth illustrative embodiments, in which the principles of the invention are utilized, and the accompanying drawings, of which:

FIG. 1 is a combined cross-sectional and electrical schematic depiction  
20 of an ESD protection structure in accordance with the present invention.

FIG. 2 is a current versus voltage (I-V) graph illustrating the simulated electrical behavior of an ESD protection structure according to the present invention formed using a 0.18 micron CMOS process technology (curve A) and a conventional GGMOS ESD protection structure formed using the same 0.18  
25 micron CMOS process technology (curve B).

#### **DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION**

30 To be consistent throughout the present specification and for clear understanding of the present invention, the following definitions are provided for terms used therein:

The terms "dopant" and "dopants" refer to donor and acceptor impurity atoms (e.g., boron [B], phosphorous [P], arsenic [As] and indium [In]), which are intentionally introduced into a semiconductor substrate (e.g., a silicon wafer) in order to change the substrate's charge-carrier concentration. See, R.S. Muller and T.I. Kamins, *Device Electronics for Integrated Circuits 2nd Edition*, 11-14 (John Wiley and Sons, 1986) for a further description of dopants.

FIG. 1 illustrates an ESD protection structure 100 for use with ICs according to the present invention. ESD protection structure 100 includes a P-type semiconductor substrate 102 (e.g., a P-type silicon substrate, a P-type epitaxial silicon substrate or a high resistance P-type silicon substrate). The dopant concentration in the semiconductor substrate 102 can be any conventional concentration known in the art. ESD protection structure 100 also includes a first N-type well region 104 and a second N-type well region 106 disposed in the semiconductor substrate 102. The dopant concentrations of the first and second N-type well regions are essentially identical. The dopant concentrations and dimensions of the first and second N-type well regions depend on the semiconductor manufacturing process technology employed to create the ESD protection structure. A typical dopant concentration for ESD protection structures created with an 0.18 micron CMOS process technology is, however, in the range of  $1\text{E}17$  atoms/ $\text{cm}^2$  to  $1\text{E}20$  atoms/ $\text{cm}^2$ , while a typical depth of the first and second N-type well regions is 1.25 microns.

The first N-type well region 104 and second N-type well region 106 are separated by a P-type gap region 108 disposed in the semiconductor substrate 102. For a 0.18 micron CMOS process technology, the P-type gap region 108 separates the first N-type well region 104 from the second N-type well region 106 by a minimum distance in the range of 0.18 microns to 0.25 microns. The P-type gap region 108 functions as a discharge space during an ESD event.

Also included in ESD protection structure 100 are a first N-type floating region 110 disposed in the first N-type well region 104 adjacent to the P-type gap region 108 and a second N-type floating region 112 disposed in the second N-type well region 106 adjacent to the P-type gap region 108. The dopant concentrations of the first and second N-type floating regions 110, 112 are



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region 108 between the first N-type floating region 110 and the second N-type floating region 112. This avalanche breakdown occurs at a trigger voltage that is dependent on the dopant profiles of the first and second N-type floating regions 110, 112 and the P-type gap region 108, as well as the separation distance between the first N-type well region 104 and the second N-type well region 106.

The structural arrangement of the first and second N-type floating regions 110, 112 and the P-type gap region 108 creates an NPN sub-structure in the center of the ESD protection structure 100. Since the distance separating the first and second N-type floating regions 110, 112 (i.e., the width of the P-type gap region 108) is relatively short, the space charge region available in the P-type gap region 108 is limited by the presence of the first and second N-type well regions 104, 106. The breakdown voltage of the P-type gap region 108 is, therefore, to an extent proportional to the separation between the first and second N-type well regions 104, 106 (i.e., to the width of the P-type gap region 108). Therefore, the triggering voltage of the ESD protection structure can be tuned to suit particular needs by providing a gap region of the appropriate width.

As the ESD event continues, the current increases to a critical switching level whereupon the ESD protection structure enters a switching state. In the switching state, "double injection" occurs from a single contact region in both of the N-type well regions. By providing both a P-type contact region and an N-type contact region in each N-type well region (i.e., by providing "double junctions"), ESD protection structures according to the present invention are capable of operating via a "double injection" mechanism. This "double injection" mechanism involves the injection of both holes and electrons, one from each side of the ESD protection structure, regardless of the polarity of an ESD pulse. In other words, depending on the polarity of ESD event, either holes are injected from the first P-type contact region or electrons are injected from the first N-type contact region. At the same time, however, either electrons are injected from the second N-type contact region or holes are injected from the second P-type contact region. This double injection (i.e., the

injection of holes from a contact region in one of the well regions, while the injection of electrons occurs from a contact region in the other well region) results in mutual space charge neutralization (i.e., the positive and negative currents of the holes and electrons compensate one another). This mutual space charge neutralization results in a conductivity modulation in the gap region (and an associated reduction in the electric field) that supports the attainment of relatively high maximum snapback currents.

ESD protection structures for use with ICs according to the present invention can, if desired, be formed with the first and second N-type well regions in an elongated “finger” arrangement (with a finger length of, for example 50 microns to 100 microns) or as multiple connected fingers.

FIG. 2 illustrates the I-V characteristics obtained from a numerical simulation for an ESD protection structure according to the present invention formed using a 0.18 micron CMOS process technology (curve A), and a conventional GGMOS ESD protection structure formed using the same 0.18 micron CMOS process technology (curve B). The current represented in FIG. 2 is, for the case of the conventional GGMOS, drain current and, for the case of ESD protection structures according to the present invention, the current through the second well region. The voltage represented in FIG. 2 is, for the case of the conventional GGMOS, the drain-to-source voltage and, for the case of ESD protection structures according to the present invention, the voltage between the first and second well regions.

For the conventional GGMOS ESD protection structure of FIG. 2, the snap-back holding voltage is approximately 6 volts. For the ESD protection structure according to the present invention, however, the snap-back holding voltage is less than 2 volts. In addition, the maximum snapback current for the ESD protection structure according to the present invention is 8 to 10 times greater than that of the conventional GGMOS ESD protection structure. The lower snapback holding voltage and higher maximum snapback current of ESD protection structures according to the present invention, therefore, provide an increase in ESD protection capability of approximately 10 times. This 10-fold increase in ESD protection capability allows the use of ESD protection

5           It should be understood that various alternatives to the embodiments of the invention described herein may be employed in practicing the invention. It is intended that the following claims define the scope of the invention and that structures within the scope of these claims and their equivalents be covered thereby.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An ESD protection structure for use with an integrated circuit comprising:

- 5 a semiconductor substrate of a first conductivity type;  
a first well region of a second conductivity type disposed in the semiconductor substrate;  
a second well region of the second conductivity type disposed in the semiconductor  
10 a gap region of the first conductivity type disposed in the semiconductor substrate and separating the first well region from the second well region,  
a first floating region of the second conductivity type disposed in the first well region adjacent to the gap region;  
15 a second floating region of the second conductivity type disposed in the second well region adjacent to the gap region;  
a first contact region of the first conductivity type disposed on the first well region and spaced apart from the first floating region;  
a second contact region of the first conductivity type disposed on  
20 the second well region and spaced apart from the second floating region;  
a first contact region of the second conductivity type disposed on the first well region and spaced apart from the first floating region;  
a second contact region of the second conductivity type disposed on the second well region and spaced apart from the second floating region.

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2. The ESD protection structure of claim 1 further comprising:

- a first electrical contact connected to the first contact region of the first conductivity type, the first contact region of the second conductivity type, and the integrated circuit; and  
30 a second electrical contact connected to the second contact region of the first conductivity type, the second contact region of the second conductivity type and to ground.

3. The ESD protection structure of claim 1, wherein the first conductivity type is P-type and the second conductivity type is N-type.

5           4. The ESD protection structure of claim 1, wherein the dopant concentrations of the first floating region and the second floating region are greater than the dopant concentrations of the first well region and the second well region.

10           5. The ESD protection structure of claim 4, wherein the dopant concentration of the first well region and the second well region is at least  $1E17$  atoms per  $cm^2$ .

15           6. The ESD protection structure of claim 1, wherein the gap region separates the first well region from the second well region with a minimum distance in the range of 0.18 microns to 0.25 microns.

20           7. The ESD protection structure of claim 1, wherein the first well region and the second well region are disposed in the semiconductor substrate in an elongated finger configuration.

**ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE**

5 An ESD protection structure for use with ICs that can protect from ESD events of both positive and negative polarities, has a low snapback holding voltage and a high maximum snapback current. The ESD protection structure includes a semiconductor substrate of a first conductivity type (typically P-type), and first and second well regions of a second conductivity type (typically N-type) disposed in the substrate. The first and second well regions are separated by a gap region of the first conductivity type in the substrate. Also 10 included are first and second floating regions (of the second conductivity type) disposed in the first and second well regions adjacent to the gap region, respectively. The ESD protection structure also includes first and second contact regions of the first conductivity type disposed on the first and second well regions, respectively, and spaced apart from the first and second floating regions, respectively. The ESD protection structure further includes first and 15 second contact regions of the second conductivity type disposed on the first and second well regions, respectively, and spaced apart from the first and second floating regions, respectively. During operation, the ESD protection structure undergoes primary breakdown by low current avalanche breakdown of the gap region between the first and second floating regions, followed by “double injection” of both holes and electrons, thereby providing for a low snapback holding voltage and a high maximum snapback current. The symmetrical 20 nature of the ESD protection structure provides for protection from both positive and negative ESD events.

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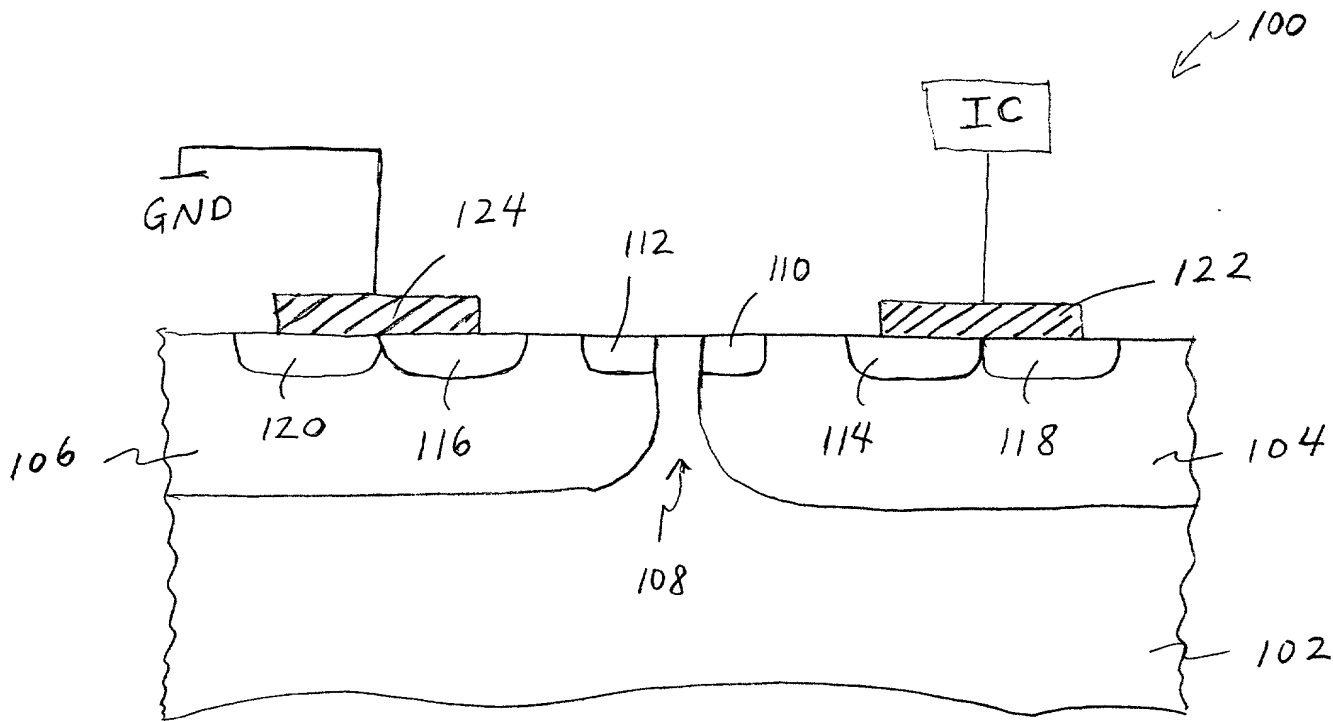


FIG. 1

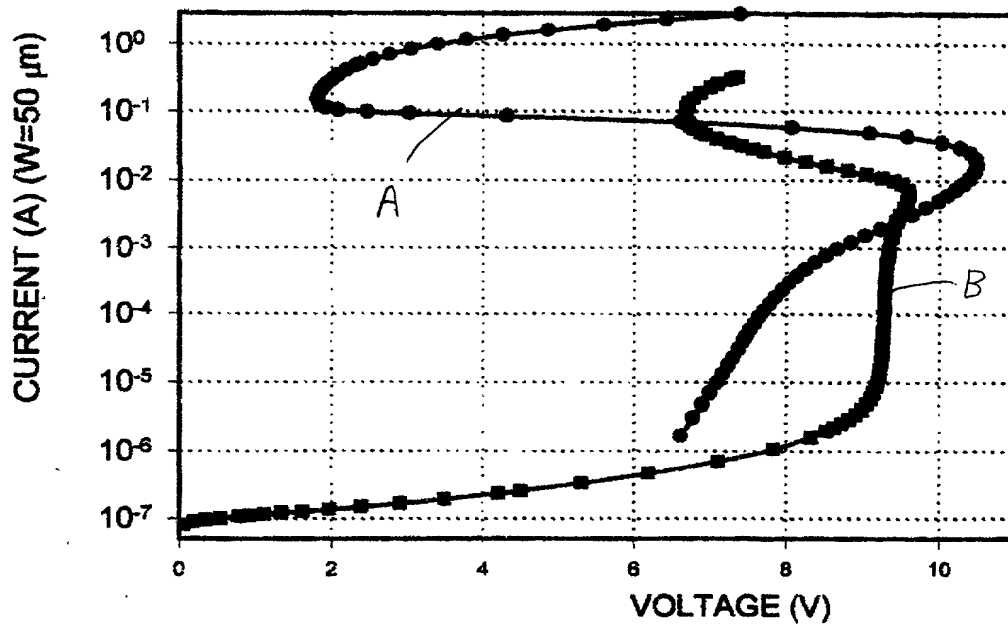


FIG. 2



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I hereby claim the benefit under 35 U.S.C. Section 119(e) of any United States provisional application(s) listed below:

_____ (Application Serial No.)	_____ (Filing Date)
_____ (Application Serial No.)	_____ (Filing Date)
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☐ Additional U.S. provisional applications are listed on a supplemental data sheet attached hereto.

I hereby claim the benefit under 35 U.S.C. 120 of any United States application(s), or 365(c) of any PCT international application designating the United States of America, listed below and, insofar as the subject matter of each of the claims of this application is not disclosed in the prior United States or PCT international application in the manner provided by the first paragraph of 35 U.S.C. 112, I acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to patentability as defined in 37 CFR 1.56 which became available between the filing date of the prior application and the national or PCT international filing date of this application:

_____ (Application Serial No.)	_____ (Filing Date)	_____ (Status) Patent No. (if applicable): _____
_____ (Application Serial No.)	_____ (Filing Date)	_____ (Status) Patent No. (if applicable): _____
_____ (Application Serial No.)	_____ (Filing Date)	_____ (Status) Patent No. (if applicable): _____

☐ Additional U.S. or PCT international application numbers are listed on a supplemental data sheet attached hereto.

I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under 18 U.S.C. 1001 and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issued thereon.

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